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Map of IBAs in Alberta

* IBA positions on map are approximate

IBA MAP KEY

IBA PAGE NUMBERS:

The circled numbers indicate the page that the associated IBA is listed on in this book. (See list on left for the name of each IBA)

REGIONAL START PAGES:

Boreal Region

Parkland Region

Grassland Region

* IBA positions on map are approximate
Alberta is fortunate to have a broad diversity of bird species and a large community of birding enthusiasts! Nature Alberta works with both the recreational birding and wildlife management communities to undertake bird research projects such as Alberta’s Breeding Bird Atlas.

Our bird conservation goals are to:
- Be a strong voice for the recovery of bird species at risk
- Work with others to assess the health of Alberta’s bird species and their habitat
- Through the Important Bird Areas program, promote the conservation of bird habitat
- Increase appreciation for Alberta’s bird biodiversity as indicators of a healthy landscape
- Promote birding as a worthy recreational pursuit that contributes to a healthy lifestyle

The Important Bird Areas Program

The Important Bird Areas (IBA) program is a major conservation effort initiated by BirdLife International in the 1980s. The goal of the IBA program is to maintain biodiversity by identifying, monitoring, and conserving a network of sites that provide essential habitat for significant bird populations. Today, there are 11,000 IBAs in approximately 200 countries around the world. About 600 of these sites are in Canada, where the program is coordinated nationally by Bird Studies Canada and Nature Canada and delivered regionally by the provinces.

About this Guide

In 2013, Nature Alberta celebrates 15 years of promoting the Important Bird Areas program in the province. We hope you will join us in our celebration by learning more about Alberta’s IBAs and the birds that use them!

This guide will take you on a journey to 43 IBAs spread across Alberta’s natural regions. These sites are recognized as globally, internationally, and nationally significant for large congregations of migratory waterfowl and shorebirds or critical habitat for bird species at risk. More than 90% of Alberta’s birds migrate each year making bird conservation an international issue. We can do our part by making sure important bird habitat is protected here at home in Alberta.
Making up more than half of the province, Alberta’s boreal region usually conjures up images of vast expanses of dense, green forest but this region is actually quite diverse. Stretching from the Northern half of the province down into Central Alberta, the boreal region consists of mixed-wood forests, wetlands and a number of lakes and rivers.

All four major North American flyways - or bird migration paths - converge in Alberta’s boreal region. As a result, millions of migratory birds visit the area every year to nest. A variety of birds also make this habitat their home all year-round. All told - the boreal region hosts a spectacular amount of biodiversity including many species of waterfowl, raptors, shorebirds and songbirds. It also provides habitat for endangered or otherwise rare species like Whooping Cranes, Trumpeter Swans and Peregrine Falcons.

To date, 15 IBAs have been officially designated in Alberta’s boreal region. This includes Alberta’s most northerly IBA, Hay and Zama Lakes.

It also includes Alberta’s two largest IBAs - the Peace-Athabasca Delta covering an area of 7,585 km², and Lesser Slave Lake with an area of 2,019 km².
Geography:
The remote Hay and Zama Lakes area includes a complex of rivers, lakes and wetlands in Northwestern Alberta. Depending on yearly fluctuations, much of the area can be open water, with banks of sedge, cattails, and willows - or balsam poplar and trembling aspen on higher ground.

Bird Life:
This area was designated a RAMSAR Wetland of International Importance in 1982, due to the extremely high numbers of waterfowl using the area. Hundreds of thousands of geese and ducks from three of four North American migration flyways use this IBA for staging (resting and feeding) during their spring and fall migrations. Ducks Unlimited Canada estimates that as many as one million birds may pass through this area every fall. This includes Canada, Snow and Greater White-fronted Geese and a number of duck and shorebird species. Bonaparte, Franklin’s and Ring-billed Gulls, Common Terns and various hawks and eagles also nest here throughout the summer. Neotropical songbirds, travelling from South and Central America to breed in the boreal forest, nest in the willows and poplar stands.

Local Stewards:
Although there are currently few roads or facilities into this area, the Hay-Zama Lakes Wildland Provincial Park was established here in 1999. Today, Alberta Parks works with the Hay-Zama Committee, a multi-stakeholder group of government, industry and the Dene Tha’ First Nation to manage the area. Since 1995, the Alberta Conservation Association has carried out waterfowl surveys every spring and fall.

Natural History Notes:
- American Coots may resemble ducks, but they are a different type of water bird, more closely related to rails than ducks. They are almost entirely black or dark brown in colour, with thick white bills.

Located 120 km west of High Level in Northwest Alberta
Latitude 58.774 • Longitude -119.023 • Size: 608 km²
Globally significant for congregatory species and large waterfowl concentrations

American Coot
Photo: C. Priestley
Peace-Athabasca Delta

Located west of Fort Chipewyan in Northeast Alberta
Latitude 58.653 • Longitude -111.813 • Size: 7585 km²
Globally significant for waterfowl concentrations and threatened species

Geography:

Alberta’s largest IBA, the Peace-Athabasca Delta is a RAMSAR Wetland of Global Significance and is for the most part located within Wood Buffalo National Park, itself a UNESCO World Heritage Site. This large inland delta is a complex of lakes and wetlands that interact with the Peace, Athabasca and Slave rivers and their tributaries.

Bird Life:

This IBA supports bird populations from all four major North American flyways. Over 200 bird species have been identified here and thousands of ducks and geese migrate through every spring and fall. Species like Northern Pintails, Blue- and Green-winged Teals, Northern Shovelers and Canvasbacks all breed in the IBA. The delta is also a breeding ground for the endangered Whooping Crane.

Local Stewards:

The Peace-Athabasca Delta – Environmental Monitoring Program Steering Committee, facilitated by Parks Canada and with participation from several First Nations communities, conservation groups and government departments is designing a comprehensive ecological monitoring program to support effective environmental stewardship of this unique area.

Natural History Notes:

- Northern Shovelers can be distinguished by their very large beaks, which they use to strain plankton from the water.
- Over 20 fish species are known to occur in the delta including Lake Trout, Lake Whitefish, Arctic Grayling, Northern Pike and the threatened Shortjaw Cisco.
Cardinal Lake, known locally as Lac Cardinal, is a shallow, large lake (50 km²). Its waters are drained through the Whitemud River into the Peace River. A large portion of the land surrounding the lake is used for agriculture, but there are some small freshwater marshes interspersed with mixedwood forests throughout the area.

**Bird Life:**

This IBA boasts upwards of 160 species and is particularly busy during migration periods. It is globally significant for its annual fall migrations of ducks and has been designated as a key staging wetland by the North American Waterfowl Management Plan. Greater White-fronted, Canada and Snow Geese, as well as Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, stage here in the fall. Small colonies of Eared Grebes and Franklin’s Gulls breed in the spring. Queen Elizabeth Provincial Park on the South shore provides excellent habitat for song birds as well as gulls and shorebirds.

**Local Stewards:**

Part of the land around the Northeast shore is maintained as a Conservation Site by the Alberta Conservation Association and its partners. Queen Elizabeth Provincial Park is maintained by Alberta Parks. Cardinal Lake has been identified as being of international significance for post breeding habitat of Barrow’s Goldeneye based on recent work completed by Ducks Unlimited Canada.

**Natural History Notes:**

- Eared Grebes are visually striking in the summer. These small birds are mostly black and reddish-brown, with golden tufts of feathers near their ears. Like Franklin’s Gulls, they build floating nests anchored to vegetation beneath the surface of the water.
Located 25 km from Grande Prairie in Northwest Alberta

Latitude 55.291 • Longitude -119.104 • Size: 1308 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species and large waterfowl concentrations

Geography:

This IBA, a mix of parkland and mixedwood forests, includes several lakes. These lakes range greatly in size, from small 500 metre ponds, to the 10 kilometre-long Bear Lake. Saskatoon Lake was designated a Federal Migratory Bird Sanctuary in 1948. Today, Saskatoon Island Provincial Park offers birding and other recreational activities to local residents and visitors alike.

Bird Life:

Although more than 150 species have been recorded here, the area is most notable for its Trumpeter Swans, who return in the spring to breed in the area and remain until their fall migration. Using peak numbers recorded between 1996 and 1998, an average of 237 Trumpeter Swans have been recorded in the area - over 1% of the estimated global population of Trumpeter Swans and about 7% of the Rocky Mountain population. Ducks and geese can number as high as 20,000 in the area throughout the year. American Coots and Canvasbacks are common in the fall. Tundra Swans have been recorded here as well.

Local Stewards:

The Friends of Saskatoon Island and Alberta Parks organize an annual Swan Festival to celebrate the return of the Trumpeters to this area. The Peace Parkland Naturalists lead birding tours and counts in the area. Ducks Unlimited Canada has a conservation site on Bear Lake.

Natural History Notes:

The largest waterfowl in North America, Trumpeter Swans were reduced almost to extinction in the early 20th century. Today, thanks to conservation efforts, they are a relatively common sight.
Frank Lake is a small, isolated lake surrounded by mixed forests, bogs and muskeg of black spruce and poplar; on the South side are wetlands which drain to a creek via marshlands. The site consists of mostly flat terrain with hummocky soil.

Up to 120 species of birds may be found in this IBA throughout the year. The area is continentally significant for Tundra Swans. During fall migration, 1,500 to 2,000 birds (between 1 and 2% of the western population) can be regularly observed on the lake. A pair of Trumpeter Swans breeds on the lake each year. Spring migrations bring Canada Geese, Buffleheads and White-winged Scoters. Red-necked Grebes also occasionally nest in the area in small numbers. Many neotropical songbirds also feed alongside the lake during migration. High counts of 50 Yellow-rumped Warblers have been noted during the spring passage.

In the spring of 2001, Barry Himer, a local resident, developed a Conservation Plan for Frank Lake on behalf of the Frank Lake Important Bird Area (IBA) Stakeholders Committee. The goals and objectives of the Conservation Plan include awareness, research and monitoring, and enforcement and regulations to protect Frank Lake and its surrounding habitat as an Important Bird Area. The Alberta Conservation Association maintains a Conservation Area surrounding the lake.

- Buffleheads are a type of diving duck common in North America. While breeding, males are mostly white, but have black wings and distinctive iridescent feathers from the neck up, with a large white patch across the back and sides of their head.
- A number of interesting mammals are found in the area including elk, moose, gray wolves, lynx and white-tailed and mule deer.
Located 80 km northwest of the town of Slave Lake in North-central Alberta

Latitude 55.88 • Longitude -115.431 • Size: 746 km²

Globally significant for waterfowl concentrations; continentally significant for congregatory species

Utikuma & Utikumasis Lakes

Geography:
Utikuma Lake is a large, extremely shallow lake with three islands and a maximum depth of 5.5 metres. Roughly 18% of its surface area is covered by emergent vegetation and it is subject to large algal blooms. The East side of the lake consists of a Sphagnum-dominated bog with an adjacent forested fen. The much smaller Utikumasis Lake lies immediately west and drains via a small river into Utikuma Lake which eventually drains into the Peace River via the Wabasca River.

Bird Life:
Both Utikuma and Utikumasis lakes attract globally significant numbers of waterfowl, especially during fall migration and the summer moult period. In July 2000, approximately 50,000 ducks were seen on Utikuma alone. Some species are also often seen in high numbers. For example, Canvasbacks numbered around 40,000 in July and August, 1975, on Utikuma Lake; this represents about 6% of the global population. Many species of colonial waterbirds nest on Utikuma Lake including Double-crested Cormorants, American White Pelicans, Common Terns, Franklins Gulls and Western Grebes.

Local Stewards:
Water levels have been monitored and maintained by Ducks Unlimited Canada via a weir since 1948.

Natural History Notes:
- The name Utikuma is Cree for “big whitefish”.
- In the summer breeding season, male Canvasback ducks can be identified by their red eyes, reddish-brown heads and necks, black chests, and grey-brown bodies. The females are less elaborate, with brown heads, necks, and chests, and similar grey-brown on their bodies.
Pelican Lake is a remote lake located at the Eastern end of the Wabasca Lakes chain, 21 km east of the Hamlet of Sandy Lake, in North-central Alberta. It is a permanent boreal lake that is surrounded by boggy wetlands. Although there is oil and gas activity in the area, there is no road access directly to the lake, so recreational activities are limited.

The area provides important nesting grounds to a globally significant American White Pelican population and a provincially significant Double-crested Cormorant population. Two islands within the lake host these breeding birds. California and Ring-billed Gulls also nest here in smaller numbers. Great Blue Herons have nested in the area in the past, but have not been found recently.

Pelican Lake has no known stewards.

- Pelicans are highly sensitive to disturbances while breeding, and so tend to choose island nesting sites that are very isolated and safe from predation by other birds and animals, such as gulls.
Kimiwan Lake

Geography:

Kimiwan Lake is a large freshwater lake situated beside the town of McLennan, Alberta, about 135 km Northeast of Grande Prairie. Along most of the shoreline, the lake-shore is characterized by marsh and mud flat habitats. The surrounding landscape is a mix of agricultural land and boreal forest, with dominant species including white spruce, balsam fir, and trembling aspen.

Bird Life:

As many as 233 species have been observed in the Kimiwan Lake IBA, with some of those species numbering in the tens of thousands. The area hosts globally significant populations of waterfowl who use the area to moult in the summer. Dabbling and diving ducks, Canada Geese, and Tundra and Trumpeter Swans are among the most common species. Shorebirds, mostly Pectoral Sandpipers and Long-billed Dowitchers, are also found during fall migration periods. Populations of songbirds can also be found in the area and include Red-winged Blackbirds, Yellow Warblers, Least Flycatchers, and many sparrow species. Non-breeding Franklin’s Gulls are abundant during the summer.

Local Stewards:

The Kimiwan Lake Naturalists, a not-for-profit society, operates an Interpretive Centre and extensive birdwalk on the South shore of the lake. Kimiwan Lake has been recognized as a natural area at the provincial level, and it is the most northerly of the potential Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network sites in the prairies.

Natural History Notes:

- Long-billed Dowitchers can be distinguished from other sandpipers by their extremely long beaks. Flocks of the Long-billed species also constantly chatter together while feeding.
Surrounding the third largest lake in Alberta, the Lesser Slave Lake IBA is the second largest IBA in the province. The town of Slave Lake is near the Southeastern corner and several small communities are located along the highway that runs along the South shore. The Northern shore of this relatively shallow (20 m) lake is steeper and often rockier than the shallower Southern shore, which contains various marsh communities. Sandy beaches and dunes are found at the Eastern end of the lake. In Lesser Slave Lake Provincial Park and all around the Eastern end of the lake, are hilly mixedwood forests of trembling aspen, balsam poplar, balsam fir, white spruce and black spruce. At the Western end of the lake there is a rich delta leading into Buffalo Bay. Both marsh and swamp habitats are represented here.

The Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory, established in 1994, is active in forest bird research, education, and conservation. They also organize an annual Songbird Festival here every year in the late spring. Alberta Parks operates the Boreal Centre for Bird Conservation – an education and research facility strategically located to study boreal birds on their breeding grounds.
This area is important for a wide diversity of birds. Around 200 species of land birds and water birds can be found here. Tundra Swans are present during spring and fall migrations in large numbers, potentially representing around 1%-2% of the North American population. In addition, some of the largest numbers of Western Grebes in the province breed in the area. Other waterfowl such as Common Mergansers, Buffleheads, and Common and Forster’s Terns pass through in moderate numbers during migration. The lake and its associated shoreline provide excellent habitat for breeding Bald Eagles and Ospreys. In August 1997, a survey of the lake and nearby shorelines produced an estimated 72 Bald Eagles. The forested areas harbor dozens of species of land birds, including 20 species of warblers, White-throated Sparrows, and Least Flycatchers. During migration, good concentrations of songbirds move between the Eastern edge of the lake and Marten Mountain.

Natural History Notes:

- Common and Forster’s Terns can be difficult to distinguish, as both are gull-like and primarily light grey with black markings on the head. However, Forster’s Terns have an all-white underside with white primary feathers, and an orange beak with a black tip. Common Terns have darker primaries, are grey on their undersides, and have a red beak with a black tip.
Lac La Biche is a large lake in Central Alberta situated within the Southern boreal forest region. It has numerous bays, and many rocky offshore islands. In some of the shallower areas protected by wind and wave action, extensive stands of emergent vegetation have formed. Coniferous and mixed forest surrounds the lake and is present on the larger islands. Typical tree species include white and black spruce, poplars and birch. Sir Winston Churchill Provincial Park overlaps with the IBA around the Eastern basin of the lake.

This area was first designated as a Bird Sanctuary in 1920 by the Government of Canada, and then became a Provincial Wildlife Sanctuary in 1930. It is an important breeding area for many different birds, including California Gulls, Double-crested Cormorants, Western and Eared Grebes, Great Blue Herons, and smaller numbers of Osprey, Bald Eagles, and various warbler species.

The Lac La Biche Birding Society is a non-profit group that works towards educating the community about local birds and natural history. The Society organizes annual Christmas and May species counts and works with schools and parks on leading and sharing information about bird populations in the area.

- Often the most commonly seen heron, the Great Blue Heron is usually found singly or in small groupings. They are large and grey in colour, with a black plume of feathers on the top of their heads.
Located 35 km from Lac La Biche in North-central Alberta

Latitude 54.73 • Longitude -111.41 • Size: 740 km²

Globally significant for congregatory species

Lakeland

Geography:

Some of the highest-quality lakes, beaches and shorelines in Alberta are found in Lakeland Provincial Park and adjacent recreation areas which contain numerous lakes and wetlands. This area of mixedwood and old growth forest is home to more than 200 bird species and a diverse range of boreal forest mammals.

Bird Life:

IBA status was granted due to the importance of the area as a breeding ground for Red-necked Grebes, with the area hosting about 2% of the North American population during the breeding season. American White Pelicans and Double-crested Cormorants are also common waterfowl during the summer. This area is unique for the large diversity of boreal bird species found here: a draft bird checklist for the Lakeland area included 251 species! Other species to note include Bald Eagles, Broad-winged Hawks, Barred and Boreal Owls, 16 species of warblers, Blue-headed Vireos, and Winter Wrens. In the fall, Common Loons may be spotted.

Local Stewards:

Alberta Parks maintains Lakeland Provincial Park which covers 147 square kilometres and includes Jackson, Kinnaird, McGuffin, Shaw, Dabbs, Helena and Blackett lakes. The park focuses on primitive “wilderness” recreation and features Alberta’s only backcountry canoe circuit. They also maintain Lakeland Provincial Recreation Area, at 443 square kilometres, the largest provincial recreation area in Alberta.

Natural History Notes:

• Red-necked Grebes are distinctive during the breeding season. Their bodies are brown in colour, while their heads are black on top with white cheeks. As their name implies, their necks are bright red.
Muriel Lake is located about 200 km northeast of Edmonton near the Town of Bonnyville. The lake is a large body of freshwater, with small offshore islands and sand and gravel bars in the Southeast corner and in the Northwest bay. The surrounding landscape is a mosaic of agricultural fields and uncultivated land. Areas of shrub thickets and aspen groves are interspersed throughout.

Bird Life:

Muriel Lake is an important area for colonial waterfowl and shorebirds. Many gulls breed here, including California, Ring-billed and Herring Gulls. Western Grebes, Double-crested Cormorants, Great Blue Herons and Piping Plovers also nest in the area, while Franklin’s Gulls, Common Terns, and American White Pelicans can be spotted in small numbers during the summer. The endangered Piping Plover has been recorded at this site in the past.

Local Stewards:

Because fluctuating water levels pose an issue for this lake, the Muriel Lake Basin Management Society is working with researchers and the Provincial Government to study and protect the lake.

Natural History Notes:

- Franklin’s Gulls are the most distinctive gull commonly found in Alberta. Adult males have black hoods and bright orange beaks, as well as a black and white checkered pattern on their wing tips.
Located 90 km from Edmonton in Central Alberta
Latitude 53.846 • Longitude -112.249 • Size: 69 km²
Globally significant for waterfowl and shorebird concentrations; nationally significant for congregatory species

Whitford and Rush Lakes are close to the railway community of Andrew, about 90 km Northeast of Edmonton. The lakes are shallow and naturally subject to large fluctuations in water level.

**Bird Life:**
Whitford and Rush Lakes have extensive emergent vegetation that is used by breeding birds. Most commonly spotted during spring migrations, many different species of shorebirds stage in the area, depending on water levels. Similarly, tens of thousands of water birds may pass through during fall migrations. Species include Western Grebes, Tundra Swans, Northern Pintails, Mallards, and Greater White-fronted Geese. One season saw over 90,000 ducks on the lake. Forster’s Terns, Eared and Western Grebes, and Black-crowned Night Herons have been known to breed in the area in smaller numbers.

**Local Stewards:**
Whitford and Rush lakes have been designated by the Government of Alberta as a Wetlands for Tomorrow site. The province also recognizes it as an environmentally significant area. Alberta Conservation Association maintains a conservation site on the South shore of Whitford Lake.

**Natural History Notes:**
- Adult Black-crowned Night Herons will often brood chicks that are not their own, an uncommon behaviour in most birds and other animals. They usually hunt at night and breed in colonies of often 10 or more nests.
A number of small to medium sized lakes are included in this IBA. Ministik Lake is a saline lake with alkaline shorelines, emergent vegetation, wet meadows, and shallow marshes. The topography is knob and kettle with lakes, ponds, and wetlands interspersed with upland forest.

Double-crested Cormorants, California Gulls and American White Pelicans breed here in relatively abundant numbers during the spring. The area is significant for its waterfowl populations, including dabbling ducks and Tundra Swans, for which the IBA is an important spring and fall staging area.

Ministik Lake, along with Miquelon Lake, was designated the first Provincial Game Bird Sanctuary in 1911. Ducks Unlimited Canada has been involved in the control of water levels, important for the variety of waterfowl in the area, since 1938.

In flight, the rhythmic flapping of Tundra Swan wings creates a musical tone, earning them the nickname “whistling swans”.

Located 20 km southeast of Edmonton in Central Alberta

Latitude 53.322 • Longitude -113.009 • Size: 107 km²
Globally significant for large waterfowl concentrations
Located 20 km from Camrose in Central Alberta
Latitude 53.253 • Longitude -112.894 • Size: 30 km²
Globally significant for congregatory species and colonial waterbirds

Miquelon Lake is actually three separate lake basins located 11 km east-northeast of the town of Hay Lakes and 20 km north of the city of Camrose. There is well developed road access, especially at the Southern and Eastern sides where Miquelon Lake Provincial Park is located. The park consists of aspen covered hills, ponds and marshes. The lakes are shallow and saline, with maximum depths of 6 m, extensive emergent vegetation, and exposed mudflats. The surrounding lands include pockets of upland forest. Forest cover is predominantly trembling aspen, balsam poplar and white spruce.

More than 200 bird species visit the park annually. California and Ring-billed gulls breed here in significant numbers. Sanderlings and Red-necked Phalaropes also use the area during summer migration. Thousands of ducks have been recorded staging during spring and fall migrations. A small number of Canada Geese nest here every year as well.

Along with Ministik Lake, Miquelon Lake was designated the first Provincial Game Bird Sanctuary in 1911. Miquelon Lake Provincial Park, maintained by Alberta Parks, overlaps the IBA, providing access for recreation.

Unlike most bird species, phalaropes exhibit sex-role reversal, so females are more vibrantly coloured than the males, and the males actually incubate and rear the young.
Covering between 10-15% of Alberta, the parkland region of Alberta is a transition area between the boreal and grassland regions. As such, the topography of this area can be highly variable, and ranges from dry, flat grasslands to hilly, forested areas to expansive marshlands.

Much of this region has been modified for agriculture and urban development, which is changing habitat and species compositions. However, this area still boasts hundreds of different species of shore birds, waterfowl, songbirds, and raptors.

Thirteen of Alberta’s IBAs are located in this region, many of which overlap with Provincial Parks or other natural areas.
Important Bird Areas in Alberta’s Parkland Region

Located west of St. Albert in Central Alberta
Latitude 53.602 • Longitude -113.728 • Size: 30 km²
Globally significant for congregatory species and waterfowl concentrations

Big Lake

Geography:
This freshwater lake is a large body of water that supports extensive stands of emergent vegetation. During low water years mudflats are also present along the North shore. The South shore supports large stands of mature aspen, birch and white spruce.

Bird Life:
Nesting colonies of Eared Grebes, Black Terns, and Franklin’s Gulls are present during the spring breeding season. Dabbling and diving ducks can be seen on the water during the summer in large numbers, and in October thousands of Tundra Swans stop to rest here during migration. Common Loons, Double-crested Cormorants, Pelicans, Great Blue Herons and Ospreys are often present fishing in the lake. American Avocets, dowitchers, and sandpipers have been reported during years when water levels are low.

Local Stewards:
Once called the Big Lake Natural Area, this area was renamed the Lois Hole Centennial Provincial Park after Alberta’s 15th Lieutenant Governor and avid naturalist, Lois Hole, in 2005. Today, the Big Lake Environmental Support Society organizes regular birding trips to their shelter and viewing platform on the East end of the lake. The lake is also recognized by the Government of Alberta as a Wetlands for Tomorrow site. Ducks Unlimited Canada, together with the Alberta Conservation Association, Alberta Parks and the City of St. Albert maintain the John E. Poole Boardwalk, also on the East end of the lake.

Natural History Notes:
- Double-crested Cormorants are mostly black in colour, and are often found feeding near pelicans. They have the distinctive habit of standing with their wings spread wide open, allowing them to dry after diving to feed.
Beaverhill Lake is located approximately 60 km southeast of Edmonton near the town of Tofield. The site includes Beaverhill Lake, although in recent years the lake has dried up, and the Beaverhill Natural Area. The shoreline is variable and includes shallow mudflats, narrow sandy beaches, and areas of dense emergent vegetation. The adjacent Beaverhill Natural Area has flat to gently rolling open grasslands with a mix of aspen groves and willow stands. Beyond the Natural Area, habitats are comprised primarily of rangeland with some cultivated areas.

The Beaverhill Bird Observatory, located within the IBA, was started in 1984 by a group of volunteers dedicated to collecting information about the bird species that inhabit the area. This group has been monitoring landbird migration in the Natural Area at the Southwestern corner of the lake beginning in 1986. Since 1994, this monitoring has consisted of a standardized daily program of mist netting and censuses. Good numbers (1,000 to 3,000) and diversity (39 to 50+ species) of landbird migrants are banded at the site each season, with the total number of individuals moving through the area being much higher. The Least Flycatcher is the most commonly banded bird at the BBO. The BBO also hosts a number of annual events, most notably the Big Birding Breakfast in the spring, and Steaks and Saw-whets in the fall. Check out www.beaverhillbirds.com for more information on these events.

Located 8 km east of Tofield in Central Alberta
Latitude 53.45 • Longitude -112.529 • Size: 208 km²
Globally, continentally, and nationally significant for waterfowl, congregatory species, wading birds and shorebird concentrations
Bird Life:

The area is significant for many species of waterfowl, shorebirds, songbirds, and raptors. In the spring and fall, hundreds of thousands of geese pass through the area, including Snow Geese and Greater White-fronted Geese. Sandhill Cranes can be found here in the springtime, and have been reported in the area with numbers as high as 8,000 at a time. The area hosts thousands of shorebirds during the summer, most notably Red-necked Phalaropes and Pectoral Sandpipers, which have each been recorded in the area with numbers as high as 10,000. Black-bellied Plovers, Semipalmated Sandpipers, and American Avocets are also commonly spotted, and Least Flycatchers, Mountain Bluebirds, Yellow Warblers, Baltimore Orioles, Warbling Vireos, and Long-eared and Saw-whet Owls, in addition to many other species, nest in the area.

Natural History Notes:

• Unlike most other birds, adult Least Flycatchers migrate to their wintering grounds before molting, while young birds molt before and during autumn migration. Why such a pattern has developed remains unclear, but it may result from strong selection on adults for early arrival and establishment of territories on the wintering grounds.
Wavy Lake is about 10 kilometres long and two to three kilometres wide.

Bird Life:

Wavy Lake is important for the tens of thousands of ducks and Greater White-fronted and Snow Geese that can be found during spring and fall migrations. Sandhill Cranes have also been seen during migration periods in smaller numbers.

Local Stewards:

Most of the land surrounding this IBA is crown land. Highway 13 is 3 kilometres south of the lake, providing well developed road access around the lake but poor access to the lakeshore itself. Ducks Unlimited Canada considers the lake a critical moulting and staging wetlands and has a restoration project in the area which is acting to preserve the wetlands surrounding the lake.

Natural History Notes:

- Sandhill Cranes can live for 20 years. They don’t mate until they are a few years old, but once they do, mated pairs stay together all year round. They are distinguishable due to their large size, large wingspans, tufted feathers on their rumps, and red facial markings.
Located 24 km from Sedgewick in East-central Alberta
Latitude 52.602 • Longitude -111.555 • Size: 28 km²
Globally significant for large waterfowl concentrations and congregatory species

Bellshill Lake

Geography:

Also known as Goose Lake, this lake has a few patches of bulrush along its shoreline, but otherwise the shoreline is open. The north end of the lake is fairly shallow, with the Central and Southern portions being a little deeper. A mixture of pasture and cultivated lands surround the lake. Most of the land contained in the IBA is undeveloped natural area.

Bird Life:

The area is known for its high fall migration numbers of Snow, Greater White-fronted, and Ross Geese, numbering as high as 20,000 individuals in some years. Canadian Geese may also be present in the fall to feed.

Local Stewards:

Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately held. Bellshill Lake is too shallow to support high numbers of fish, and the area lacks tourism facilities, making recreational activities other than hunting uncommon.

Natural History Notes:

- Ross Geese arrive in the area earlier than Snow Geese, which make up the majority of the waterfowl numbers counted each year. Because of this, there may be higher numbers of Ross Geese that use the area than originally thought, making the area even more significant for migratory waterfowl.
Schultz Lake

Alberta’s smallest IBA, this small non-alkaline lake is fairly shallow with an abundance of submergent vegetation. Most of the surrounding lands are croplands.

Schultz Lake hosts significant numbers of geese during fall migration. Up to 25,000 individuals have been counted at one time, although more typical numbers range between 10-20,000. This goose population is primarily made up of Snow Geese, although Greater White-fronted and Canada Geese are also present. Thousands of ducks and small numbers of Tundra Swans can also be seen during the fall. Red-tailed Hawks, Northern Harriers and eagles have been seen passing through in the fall.

Most of the lands around the lake are held privately.

Canada Geese are one of the best known species in the country, and provide an example of how successful wildlife protection plans can be. Once a threatened species, conservation efforts have helped these birds to rebound, and they now occur in huge numbers across Canada.
Killarney, Dillberry and Leane Lakes

Geography:

Killarney, Dillberry and Leane lakes are a cluster of alkali lakes close to the Alberta-Saskatchewan provincial border. The largest lake, Killarney Lake (4.4 km², 10 km of shoreline) is a shallow lake with 10 to 100 metre wide shorelines. Dillberry Lake, at half the size, has 5 kilometres of mostly sandy and vegetated shoreline. The shorelines of the smaller Leane Lake include mudflats and gravelly beaches covered with alkali deposits.

Bird Life:

The IBA designation comes from the population of Piping Plovers that breed in the area in numbers that represent over 1% of the prairie population. Spring migrations bring thousands of Red-necked Phalaropes and other shorebirds, including Stilt Sandpipers. Yellow-headed and Red-winged Blackbirds may also be found in reeds next to the water.

Local Stewards:

Designated as an IBA in 2008, the area is mostly located within Dillberry Lake Provincial Park, which is open to the public between May and September. The park was established in 1957, and offers several types of recreation. Killarney and Leane Lakes are part of a complex of lakes on the border region identified as a potential Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site because of their importance to an endangered species and migrating shorebirds. The Vermilion River Naturalists Society often leads birding and other fieldtrips in this area.

Natural History Notes:

- Piping Plovers are stout shorebirds that may be found on sandy beaches. They have pale brown feathers on their wings and back, and white plumage on their undersides with black beaks. During breeding, the males have a distinctive black band around their necks, a black spot on their forehead, and their beak is mostly orange with a black tip.
- The nationally vulnerable Northern Leopard Frog used to be found here.
Hansman Lake

Hansman Lake is fairly alkaline with no emergent vegetation. Most of the land around the lake is cultivated.

Bird Life:

The Hansman Lake IBA hosts tens of thousands of migrating geese in the fall. Most common are Snow Geese, however Ross Geese can number as high as 5,000 in a season. Piping Plovers have also nested here in the past.

Local Stewards:

Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately held.

Natural History Notes:

- Many of the Snow Geese present during the fall make their way to the area via the Central Flyway zone, known for its high numbers of waterfowl.
- Despite the abundance of certain species of waterfowl in the area, ducks and swans are rarely present on the lake.

Located 30 km from Sedgewick in East-central Alberta
Latitude 52.494  •  Longitude -111.653  •  Size: 19 km²
Globally significant for congregatory species and large waterfowl concentrations
Metiskow and Sunken lakes are both small, shallow lakes. Metiskow Lake is just north of the community of Metiskow, while Sunken Lake is to the south. The town of Provost is about 30 km to the east. These lakes are permanent hypersaline lakes surrounded by aspen parkland and some cultivated land.

Huge numbers of migrating Baird’s Sandpipers and Sanderlings can be found at this site, sometimes numbering into the thousands each spring. Other shorebirds during spring migration include White-rumped and Semipalmated Sandpipers. Both Piping Plovers and Whooping Cranes have been recorded in the area. Songbirds in the surrounding aspen forest include Hermit Thrushes, Lark Sparrows, Myrtle Warblers and Spotted Towhees.

This IBA is recognized provincially as an Environmentally Significant Area. Metiskow Lake is also a potential regional WHSRN (Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network) site.

Hypersaline lakes have a higher salt concentration than sea water, creating an inhospitable environment for many otherwise common aquatic organisms. Instead, hypersaline lakes often support unique microbial and crustacean life, which serves as an alternate food source for animals such as birds.

Scratch grass, a rare plant in Alberta, is found in this area, one of only a few locations province-wide.
Bearhills Lake is a shallow lake, with a maximum depth of 15 to 20 feet, and a small buffer of aspen around the perimeter. The site includes some grassland, shrubs and sandhill areas in the surrounding uplands. The adjacent uplands are quite extensive since the basin for Bearhills Lake is one of the largest in the region. The majority of the shoreline areas consist of bulrushes and cattails.

This IBA is important for staging and moulting ducks during fall migration. Often over 20,000 individuals are observed, but highs of over 100,000 have been recorded. Marsh birds, like Red-winged and Yellow-headed Blackbirds nest in the vegetation along the shoreline.

• Ducks Unlimited Canada considers the lake to be a critical moulting and staging area for waterfowl and have built a weir on Bigstone Creek to limit lake level fluctuations. There is limited recreation available within the IBA site, although there has been an increase in subdivision development, boating and other water activities over the past few years.
Located 10 km from Stettler in East-central Alberta
Latitude 52.25 • Longitude -112.883 • Size: 172 km²
Globally significant for congregatory species; continentally significant for shorebird concentrations

Geography:
In addition to Ewing and Erskine Lakes, this site also includes Grose and Postill lakes, as well as Shuckburgh Slough. The site is a series of discontinuous wetlands and adjacent parkland and grassland within a largely cultivated landscape. Most of these wetlands have extensive emergent vegetation, mostly bulrushes.

Bird Life:
This area is important as a staging site for ducks during their fall migration. Up to 20,000 individuals have been recorded in the area. Postill Lake is a good breeding area for diving ducks, as it is fairly fresh with bulrush and cattail vegetation. In addition to the ducks, a small number of Canada Geese nest on Erskine Lake each year. The area is generally productive for a variety of marsh birds and is also important shorebird staging habitat.

Local Stewards:
Ducks Unlimited Canada considers both Ewing and Erskine lakes to be critical moulting and staging wetlands for ducks. Alberta Fish and Wildlife have had a Crop Damage Control waterfowl feeding station at West Erskine Lake in the past. Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately held.

Natural History Notes:
- Ewing Lake tends to dry up regularly, negatively affecting the habitat suitability for shorebirds and some waterfowl.
St. Lawrence Lake

Geography:
St. Lawrence Lake is a small, shallow, alkaline lake with fluctuating water levels and no emergent vegetation. The lake fluctuates in size, being only half its normal size in the fall of 2000. The land around the lake is mostly pastureland.

Bird Life:
During the fall, globally significant numbers of Snow and Greater White-fronted Geese stage in the area, numbering as high as 30,000. Many other waterfowl utilize the lake and surrounding area.

Local Stewards:
The lake is fairly isolated, and so recreational activities are non-existent.

Natural History Notes:
- Like many geese species, Greater White-fronted Geese mate for long periods of time. But in addition to mate pairings, family associations between parents and children, or siblings, can last for years between these birds, sometimes throughout the rest of their lives.

Located 15 km from Provost in East-central Alberta
Latitude 52.346 • Longitude -110.026 • Size: 12 km²
Globally significant for congregatory species and large waterfowl concentrations

Tree Swallows

Greater White-fronted Goose

Photo: E. Campbell

Photo: Nature Alberta
Located 20 km from Consort in East-central Alberta
Latitude 52.148 • Longitude -110.494 • Size: 77 km²
Globally significant for congregatory species and large shorebird concentrations; nationally significant for congregatory species.

Sounding Lake

Geography:
Sounding Lake and Greenlee Lake to the north (which is part of the site) are alkali lakes that are dry in drought years. Habitat types include upland fescue grass communities interspersed with aspen groves. The lake is fed by Sounding Creek and drains into Eyehill Creek. Upland areas are important for white-tailed deer and mule deer.

Bird Life:
Sounding Lake water levels fluctuate widely from year to year. Because of this, bird populations such as the Piping Plover often fluctuate with it. Typically, this IBA hosts significant numbers of shorebirds during spring and fall migrations. Spring species include Baird’s Sandpipers, Sanderlings and Stilt Sandpipers. Fall species include Lesser Yellowlegs.

Local Stewards:
The area is relatively isolated, with no direct roads leading to the lake. Most of the land surrounding the lake is privately held. The site is a potential Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) Regional site.

Natural History Notes:
• Piping Plovers prefer lower water levels so that they can nest on the shores, while waterfowl are more likely to be found in large numbers during years with higher water levels.
Gooseberry Lake is one of the few permanent saline lakes in Alberta. The surrounding landscape is characterized by fescue-dominated grasslands, with scattered Trembling Aspen groves and areas of scrub vegetation also being present.

Variable water levels make this area important for a variety of shorebirds. Thousands of Red-necked Phalaropes can be found during spring and fall migration periods, sometimes numbering as high as 10,000. Sanderlings and Semipalmated Sandpipers usually gather in large numbers during their spring migrations. Endangered Piping Plovers have nested in the area in small numbers in the past. Grassland bird species are also present; a Sharp-tailed Grouse lek is located in the immediate vicinity of the lake.

Although most of the area is privately held, the Gooseberry Lake Provincial Park overlaps with a portion of the Northwestern shore of the lake. Gooseberry Lake has been identified as part of a complex of lakes identified as a potential Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site because of its regional importance to shorebirds, and it has also been identified as critical moulting and staging wetland by Ducks Unlimited Canada.

Sanderlings can be distinguished from other Sandpipers by their normally pale, nearly white, colour, save for a darker brown patch on the wings. During the breeding season the males have reddish heads and breasts. They can be seen running along the shores, where they feed on small invertebrates.
Alberta’s grassland region encompasses the Southern part of the province, east of the Rocky Mountains. Comprised mostly of plains, rolling hills and badlands, it is considered the most at-risk natural region in Alberta, partially due to conversion of the land for agriculture and urban development.

Most of the vegetation is, as the name would imply, made up of grasses and some shrubs, and the climate is the warmest and driest in the province. Many species found here are unique to this area or rare in other areas of the province. In fact, the grasslands region has the highest proportion of endangered species within Alberta. Some of the bird species at risk include Burrowing Owls, Sage Grouse and Ferruginous Hawks.

Alberta’s grassland region is home to 15 small to medium-sized IBAs. This includes Alberta’s smallest IBA – Shultz Lake at just over 3 km² – as well as a number of other prairie lakes and reservoirs.
Sullivan Lake

Sullivan Lake is a large, shallow lake with fluctuating water levels.

Bird Life:

Sullivan Lake is a critical staging and breeding ground for many waterfowl and shorebirds. During the spring, Baird’s, Semipalmated, and Stilt sandpipers can be found staging during migration. Thousands of waterfowl stage during their fall migrations, and the area also serves as breeding ground for smaller numbers of Baird’s Sparrows, Sprague’s Pipits, and Ferruginous Hawks.

Local Stewards:

Ducks Unlimited Canada has a plan for wetland retention and wetland restoration in the NAWMP Sullivan Lake landscape which will protect and restore habitats for dabbling ducks, specifically targeting Northern Pintail.

Natural History Notes:

- Semipalmated Sandpipers are one of only two sandpipers that have webbing between their toes, hence the name “palmated”. They are also thought to travel between Southern Canada and South America, a distance of approximately 2,500 miles, without stopping.
Located 20 to 40 km from Hanna in Southeastern Alberta
Latitude 51.846 • Longitude -112.233 • Size: 67 km²
Globally significant for waterfowl concentrations; nationally significant for threatened Piping Plovers

Chain Lakes

Geography:
The Chain Lakes IBA is made up of several lakes and overlaps with Chain Lakes Provincial Park.

Bird Life:
This IBA designation comes from the area’s breeding Piping Plover population, as well as the many thousands of waterfowl found during fall migration. Baird’s Sparrows and Sprague’s Pipits also breed in the area in smaller numbers. eBird shows 61 species recorded at this IBA.

Local Stewards:
Other than the provincial park, most of the land is privately held, so opportunities for birding are not readily available.

Natural History Notes:
• Male Sprague’s Pipits display to females by flying in the air, sometimes for upwards of half an hour.
• Baird’s Sparrows often run to evade predators or other threats rather than fly away. They are notoriously hard to spot due to their low-lying behavior on the ground, and are heard more often than they are seen.
Wetland complexes, consisting of ephemeral marshes, wet meadows and alkali marshes surround this large alkali lake. Dowling Lake is fed by Wolf Creek and by alkaline springs, but there is no outflow from the lake. The substrate along the shoreline consists of gravel and mud.

Threatened Piping Plovers occur in nationally significant numbers in the area. This IBA also hosts a range of colonial waterfowl during the breeding season, including Double-crested Cormorants, Common Terns, and Great Blue Herons. Large numbers of geese use the area for staging during the fall. eBird shows records for 100 species at this IBA.

Lands around the lake are privately held. Dowling Lake has been identified as a potential Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site under the endangered species category.

Male Redhead calls sound similar to a cat’s meow, and females are notorious for parasitizing nests by laying their eggs in the nests of the similar-looking Canvasback duck.
Geography:

This large but shallow saline lake is surrounded by a mix of native grassland and cultivated fields.

Bird Life:

This IBA is significant for the number of waterfowl that pass through during fall migration, numbering in the tens of thousands each season. The area also serves as a breeding ground for many other bird species, including Baird’s Sparrows, Loggerhead Shrikes, Sprague’s Pipits, Sharp-tailed Grouse, and Upland Sandpipers.

Local Stewards:

This IBA is recognized by the province as a provincial Environmentally Significant Area.

Natural History Notes:

- Pintails are long and slender with narrow wings, earning them the nickname “grey-hounds of the air”. They are also one of the first ducks to migrate north in the spring and south in the fall.
Handhills Lake

Handhills Lake has almost 18 km of shoreline with large, extensive mudflats, alkali flats, sand beaches, and pebble shorelines. The lake is fed by alkali springs and a number of small, intermittent channels, but there is no drainage out of the lake.

Bird Life:

This IBA has been designated for its Piping Plovers (between 21 and 77 birds, approximately 1% of the Northern Great Plains population). Additionally, thousands of staging ducks, geese and shorebirds are present during the fall. eBird shows records for 77 species at this IBA including a number of songbirds.

Local Stewards:

Handhills Lake has been identified as a potential Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network (WHSRN) site under the endangered species category. Lands around the lake are privately held.

Natural History Notes:

- Blue-winged Teals are flightless, and therefore vulnerable, during their summer molt. They spend much of their time hidden in the prairie potholes during this period.
Located 29 km from Veteran in East-central Alberta

Latitude 51.848 • Longitude -111.207 • Size: 243 km²

Globally significant for large waterfowl concentrations

This IBA includes Little Fish Lake itself, the Little Fish Lake Provincial Park on the East side of the lake and the Hand Hills Ecological Reserve on the Northwest side. This small lake is shallow, alkaline, slightly saline and very productive. The 14 km shoreline contains extensive gravel beaches with alkali deposits that are between 10 and 30 m wide. The Hand Hills are an unusual feature in Alberta in that they are a remnant Tertiary plateau that rises 146 m above the surrounding area. Extensive areas of relatively undisturbed northern rough fescue grassland are found here.

The area’s IBA status comes from the historical use of the shorelines by Piping Plovers as breeding grounds. Other species at risk that breed in the area include Ferruginous Hawks, Loggerhead Shrikes, Long-billed Curlews, and Sprague’s Pipits. Fall migration brings thousands of geese to the lake. eBird shows records of 89 species at this IBA.

Ducks Unlimited Canada maintains a weir structure to restore water levels to the lake, which should make the area more suitable for Piping Plovers in the future. Both the Hand Hills Ecological Reserve and the small provincial park are maintained by Alberta Parks. The lake is also designated a Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network site.

- Ferruginous Hawks feed mainly on ground squirrels, with breeding pairs consuming up to 500 of these small rodents in one nesting season. It is also North America’s largest species of hawk.
Eagle Lake is the largest of four lakes in this IBA and is surrounded mainly by agricultural land, some country residential development along the Northwest shore, and a small recreational area on the East shore. Stobart Lake, which is immediately southeast of Namaka Lake, is the most natural of the three lakes and has extensive development of near-shore and offshore emergents such as cattails and bulrushes. The site also includes Ballina Lake, which is a small Ducks Unlimited Canada wetland project located between Namaka and Stobart lakes.

Ducks and Tundra Swans are found at this IBA during the fall migration period. Red-necked Phalaropes and Western Grebes can be found during their spring migrations in smaller numbers, and Wilson’s Phalaropes use the area to stage in the fall. Smaller populations of shore birds inhabit the area during the fall, and Bald Eagles can be seen over the winter months.

Highway 1 (TransCanada) runs east-west 1.6 km north of Eagle Lake, although road access to most of the lakes is limited. The Namaka, Ballina, and Stobart wetlands are all Ducks Unlimited Canada projects. Stobart Lake is under agreement between Ducks Unlimited Canada and the Siksika Nation.

Wilson’s Phalaropes can be distinguished from Red-necked Phalaropes by the time of year they can be found in the area, but also by their markings. While breeding, female Red-necked Phalaropes have a black head with large, white spots on both sides, and a bright red neck. The female Wilson’s Phalaropes, present during the fall when the birds are out of the breeding season, have a much more muted colour and are mostly white on the underside with mottled grey or brown on their backs.
Located along the CPR line between Cavendish and Atlee in Southeast Alberta

Latitude 50.0818 • Longitude -110.703 • Size: 111 km²

Nationally significant for threatened Loggerhead Shrike

Geography:

The Cavendish Railline is a 36 km long by 1 km wide strip of land along the Canadian Pacific Railway and Secondary Highway 555 between the towns of Cavendish and Atlee, Alberta. The habitat consists of tall shrubs of mainly thorny buffalo-berry interspersed among the exotic grasses of the right-of-way. Surrounding this strip of habitat is native mixed grassland, interspersed with small amounts of cropland and non-native plant pasturelands.

Bird Life:

This area hosts the densest population of breeding Loggerhead Shrikes in Alberta, around 2% of the Canadian population. This species is nationally endangered. The native grassland areas adjacent to the rail line support a wide variety of mixed grassland species, including Upland Sandpiper, Long-billed Curlew (nationally vulnerable), Baird’s Sparrow, and Sprague’s Pipit (nationally threatened).

Natural History Notes:

- Loggerhead Shrikes are medium sized songbirds with a distinctive black mask across their eyes. Their undersides are white, and their wings and backs are usually a light grey-brown colour. They are also notable for the fact that, along with Northern Shrikes, they stand alone as predatory songbirds, actively hunting their prey which may consist of frogs, mice, or insects. They have recently been the subject of field breeding experiments in Ontario, where breeding pairs are moved to enclosed areas like zoos to breed and raise their young, and then released again once the young are old enough to embark on their own. The specifics of their decline are not clearly known.

Top Photo: Upland Sandpiper / C. Artuso

Photo: G. Romanchuk

Local Stewards:

Most of the land is not available for public use, so birding or other recreation activities are limited.
Frank Lake is a shallow lake bordered by marshes and low-lying meadows, although some of the shoreline is non-vegetated. Much of the surrounding landscape has been cultivated, with some native grassland remaining.

Frank Lake has a history of fluctuating water levels. Since the 1970s, Ducks Unlimited Canada has acquired land on the West and Northeast shores and has been managing the area by controlling water flow using treated waste water from a meat packing plant and the Town of High River. The grassland portion of this site is managed for grassland species of both tall dense cover and of shorter grassland habitats. Many artificial structures, including nest boxes, nest platforms, and rock islands, have been placed in Frank Lake to enhance breeding bird habitat. The effect of the many visitors to Frank Lake, who come to bird-watch, hunt, and conduct research, is being considered by Ducks Unlimited Canada. eBird shows 186 species recorded for this IBA.
Frank Lake (South) IBA is considered the most important wetland in Southern Alberta for breeding water birds. Frank Lake contains a wide variety of waterfowl and shorebirds during spring and fall migrations. Species present in the area include Trumpeter and Tundra Swans, Northern Pintails, Baird’s Sandpipers, Long-billed Dowitchers, Eared Grebes, and Marbled Godwits. There are also multiple threatened or endangered species that breed in the area, including Loggerhead Shrikes, Short-eared Owls, Ferruginous Hawks, and Long-billed Curlews. Franklin’s Gulls also breed in the area, with recorded numbers as high as 10,000 individuals in past years.

Bird Life:

Located 6 km east of High River in Southern Alberta
Latitude 50.546  •  Longitude -113.707  •  Size: 44 km²
Globally, continentally and nationally significant for congregatory species and large waterfowl concentrations

Natural History Notes:

- Marbled Godwits, a larger shorebird, can be distinguished by their extremely long bills, which are slightly upturned and black at the tip.
- Although previously uncommon, Black-necked Stilts have been increasing in this area. These shorebirds have incredibly long red legs, black and white feathers, and thin, sharply pointed black beaks.
Lake Newell & Kitsim Reservoir

This IBA includes Lake Newell, Kitsim Reservoir, Little Rolling Hills Reservoir, Kinbrook Island Provincial Park and some gently rolling uplands. Lake Newell is a large, mildly eutrophic reservoir with extensive marsh habitat and a number of small to medium sized islands, most of which are included in Kinbrook Island Provincial Park.

Bird Life:

American White Pelicans breed here and can be found throughout the summer. The area also serves as breeding grounds for many other birds. Species to note are the endangered Burrowing Owls, Long-billed Curlews, California and Ring-billed Gulls, Double-crested Cormorants, and Black-bellied Plovers.

Local Stewards:

The Eastern Irrigation District owns more than 90% of the land around these waterbodies. Access to Pelican Island is prohibited between April 15 and September 15 each year to protect colonial bird nesting sites. Lake Newell Provincial Park is managed by Alberta Parks for recreational and commercial fisheries.

Natural History Notes:

- The largest of the North American Plovers, male Black-bellied Plovers have a distinctive black underside that ranges from the belly all the way to the underside of their bills during the breeding season.
- This site is significant for a population of Great Plains Toad (red-listed in Alberta) and is also possibly the only site in Canada for Water Hyssop and one of only three known Alberta locations for Slender Mouse-ear Cress.

Located 7 km from Brooks in Southern Alberta

Latitude 50.417 • Longitude -111.937 • Size: 114 km²

Nationally significant for congregatory species and colonial waterbird concentrations
This IBA includes McGregor Lake, Travers Reservoir, Little Bow Lake Reservoir and Little Bow Provincial Park. All three bodies of water form part of the Carseland-Bow River Headworks System; McGregor Lake is part of the Oldman River drainage basin and was created in 1920 by two dams bracketing Snake Lake. None of the lakes have extensive marshy areas but there are mudflats at the north end of McGregor Lake. Native mixed grasslands, badlands, and eroding coulees surround the reservoirs.

The area serves as a breeding ground for numerous species, including California Gulls and small numbers of Double-crested Cormorants. Small numbers of at-risk grasslands species such as breeding Burrowing Owls, Ferruginous Hawks, Long-billed Curlews, and Golden Eagles have also been spotted in the area. Ducks and shorebirds stage in the area in the thousands during spring and fall migrations. There is also a large population of non-breeding American White Pelicans that stage during the summer, representing approximately 1% of the Canadian population.

Little Bow Provincial Park on the Northwest tip of Lake McGregor is maintained by Alberta Parks. Federal boating and provincial sport fishing limits and regulations apply to all three reservoirs. Lake McGregor reservoir is operated by the Bow River Irrigation District.

- The Low Milk Vetch, a rare plant in Alberta, is found at the site as are mule and white-tailed deer.
Chappice Lake

This IBA includes the lake and a one kilometre buffer of grasslands. Chappice Lake is a permanent saline lake, with a shoreline of 7.2 km, surrounded by native mixed grassland. The shorelines are often soft and muddy, and there are extensive alkali deposits. There are saline springs and seepages in excellent condition.

Chappice Lake hosts a wide diversity of birds throughout the summer and winter, including many endangered or threatened species. The IBA designation is primarily due to the high number of migratory shorebirds that frequent the area, including Baird’s Sandpipers, Willets, American Avocets, and Wilson’s Phalaropes. In addition to this, the area is very important for grassland birds such as the Burrowing Owl, Ferruginous Hawk, Long-billed Curlew, and Sprague’s Pipit. eBird shows 75 species for this IBA.

This site is included within a larger area that has been identified as a provincial Ecologically Significant Area, and has limited access due to private land ownership. In addition, Chappice Lake is a potential regional and endangered species category WHSRN (Western Hemisphere Shorebird Reserve Network) site.

- Unlike many other owl species, Burrowing Owls are active during the day. They are small, slightly larger than a robin, and make their nests in pre-existing burrows on the ground left empty by small animals such as prairie dogs.
- Scratch grass (Muhlenbergia asperifolia), a rare plant in Alberta, occurs at Chappice Lake. This is one of only a few (approximately 6-20) occurrences in the province.
- This grassland area also supports good populations of Richardson’s ground squirrels.
Located halfway between Lethbridge and Medicine Hat in Southeastern Alberta
Latitude 50.062 • Longitude -111.832 • Size: 9 km²
Globally significant for congregatory species

Hays Reservoir is an artificial reservoir with five small islands that are used by colonial nesting birds. The reservoir contains little marsh development, but it is surrounded by native mixed grassland habitat. An irrigation canal feeds the reservoir.

Bird Life:
This IBA is most notable for its extremely high numbers of American White Pelicans during the breeding season, representing about 4% of the global population. This colony is the largest in Alberta. In addition to pelicans, the area also hosts large numbers of breeding Ring-billed and California Gulls, Caspian Terns, and Double-crested Cormorants. Diving and dabbling ducks, as well as geese, use the area while moulting and staging, although in smaller numbers than the above species.

Local Stewards:
Lloyd Bennett is the Caretaker of this IBA and together with the Lethbridge Naturalists, often leads birding field-trips and counts in this area.

Natural History Notes:
• Hays Reservoir IBA has been designated as a provincial Environmentally Significant Area, indicating its importance in maintaining long-term diversity in the area.
• The nationally vulnerable Great Plains Toad was reported breeding at this site in 1982.
St. Mary Reservoir

Geography:
The St. Mary Reservoir was created in 1951 by damming the St. Mary River. The reservoir itself is a large water storage area (19 km by 8 km at its widest) within the St. Mary River valley. When the reservoir level drops by its mean annual drawdown of 6.7 metres, 46% of the reservoir area is exposed as mudflats. There are also five permanent islands near the upstream end, and other islands appear as the water level drops. Aside from the reservoir itself, there is some natural short-grass prairie and agricultural lands in the surrounding area. The terrain around the reservoir is mostly gently undulating to flat.

Bird Life:
This IBA is most notable for the California Gulls who breed here, along with Ring-billed Gulls and Double-crested Cormorants. Common Terns and Eared Grebes use the area in the summer but usually don’t breed. Significant populations of American White Pelicans have been recorded nesting here, as well as small numbers of Piping Plovers.

Local Stewards:
The St. Mary Reservoir Provincial Recreation Area now offers recreation activities in the area.

Natural History Notes:
• Almost identical while breeding, you can tell Ring-billed Gulls from California Gulls by the red ring around their eyes and their red gape. They also have a black ring around their beaks, which is easier to use for field identifications. California Gulls have orange orbital rings, and red and black spots located close together on their beaks.
Located 25 km east – southeast from Foremost in Southern Alberta

Latitude 49.323 • Longitude -110.949 • Size: 276 km²

Globally and nationally significant for congregatory species, waterfowl and shorebird concentrations

Geography:

Pakowki Lake is an intermittent freshwater lake and sand dune-wetland complex. There are extensive bulrush marshes and areas of open water. The only inflow channel is the Etzikom Coulee, which is an impressive glacial spillway channel; the lake has no outflows, except for under extremely high water levels where a channel south to the Milk River would allow for outflow. The surrounding uplands are predominantly mixed-grass prairie.

Bird Life:

This IBA is significant for migrating waterfowl and shorebirds, most notably ducks, Stilt Sandpipers, American Avocets, Wilson’s Phalaropes, and dowitchers. Pakowki Lake is also important as a breeding ground for many other bird species, including White-faced Ibises, Great Blue Herons, and Ring-billed and California Gulls. eBird reports 168 species recorded at this IBA.

Local Stewards:

Road access surrounds the lake but actual access to the shore is limited. Most of the surrounding land is used for agriculture, and much is privately held, so recreational activities are limited. Despite this, part of the lake has been designated a Provincial Bird Sanctuary allowing birders to enjoy the large diversity supported here.

Natural History Notes:

• In addition to the many bird species found here, the Pakowki Lake area is also home to pronghorn antelope, the Plains Hognose Snake, and two at-risk plant species, the Smooth Goosefoot and Western Spiderwort.
Birding is a fun and challenging activity that the whole family can participate in. It can be done almost anywhere, and is relatively inexpensive. All you really need is a pair of binoculars, a keen eye, and a bird ID book! Here are some quick tips to get you started:

- **Keep your eye** on the bird for as long as you can. Rather than quickly looking to your ID book after spotting an unfamiliar species, try to take in as many details as possible first. Things like overall size, distinctive markings, and beak shape can give you valuable clues as to the type of bird you’re looking at.

- **Take note** of the habitat your bird is located in. Is it marshy, or wooded? Grassy, or along a shoreline? This will also help you narrow down your species.

- **Try to listen** for your bird’s call while looking at it. Over time you’ll learn to ID birds using their songs and calls, which is useful because it is often easier to hear birds than it is to spot them visually.

- **Keep a notebook** or a field form with you, like the one provided in this guide, and write down your observations. This will help you track bird behaviour, making for better birding opportunities, and contribute to research by uploading your data to eBird!
Visit an IBA site!

Whether you are a seasoned birder or just starting out, we hope you will practice your birding skills by visiting an IBA site in your area. IBA site maps are available at www.ibacanada.ca. Information about provincial parks associated with IBA sites can be found at www.albertaparks.ca. If the land is privately owned, please ask permission from the land-owner before accessing. Safety for you and the birds is the number one priority. Please practice good birding etiquette wherever your birding takes you!

If you do visit a site, we’d love to hear about it! For this reason, we have included an IBA Site Visit form in this booklet. You can also download copies of this form on our website at www.naturealberta.ca. Please complete this form the best you can and submit it to Nature Alberta.

Integral to bird conservation in Alberta are the thousands of recreational birders who generously share their sightings data with wildlife agencies and research organizations. We hope you will consider uploading your bird sightings to eBird (ebird.org/content/canada/). Organizations like the Alberta Conservation Association, Bird Studies Canada and Nature Alberta can access eBird data for projects like at-risk species status reports and breeding bird atlases.

Equally important are the many Albertans who volunteer to steward the province’s natural areas. The IBA program calls these stewards “caretakers”. IBA caretakers are the keystone of our IBA program in many ways! Caretakers need only have an interest in birds, conservation, or the outdoors, and be able to make a few trips out to their IBA each year. If you are interested in becoming a caretaker of one of Alberta’s IBA sites, check out what is required by visiting www.ibacanada.ca/ and clicking on “IBA Caretakers > What is a Caretaker?”, or contact us at Nature Alberta by calling 780 427-8124 or emailing birds@naturealberta.ca.

If you are just starting out as a birder, we hope you will visit some of the web links listed in this guide. We also encourage you to join one of Alberta’s many local natural history clubs - a great way to hear about and participate in many different birding fieldtrips and events. For a list of some of these clubs, see naturealberta.ca/our-clubs/.

Get Involved!

Birding is a great recreational pursuit and can also contribute to science and wildlife management. Photo: K. Yakimovich
Our caretaker network is a dynamic one, drawing from a diverse group of dedicated naturalists. Our caretakers may be members of naturalist clubs, landowners living near IBAs, or have no particular affiliation, just an interest in conservation.

Although the duties of our IBA coordinators can vary from site to site, a few core responsibilities define this role. The primary goal of an IBA Caretaker is to monitor and report any changes in bird populations or habitat to the regional IBA partner, Nature Alberta. This entails visiting the IBA and filling out the site evaluation form, which provides Nature Alberta with pertinent, up-to-date information about the sites. Depending on the IBA, these visits may be done a couple of times a year or seasonally. Ideally, caretakers will be familiar with and live in close proximity to their IBA, in order to more easily facilitate these visits.

Any bird counts done while in the field are also then uploaded to eBird, an international bird database that IBA Canada uses to store and access up-to-date information on each IBA. It is easy to do, and tutorials are available on the IBA Canada website, www.ibacanada.ca. See the following page (eBird) for more information on this valuable resource.

Logging volunteer hours also helps organizations like Nature Alberta to gauge the level of conservation effort at a given IBA, allowing us to allocate our resources appropriately and ensure that the needs of every IBA are met.

Additionally, caretakers may wish to get involved on a larger scale, incorporating active outreach and conservation plans into their roles. Contact birds@naturealberta.ca if you are interested in joining our IBA Caretaker network!
A useful tool for the everyday birder!

Together, the Cornell Lab of Ornithology, the Audubon Society, and Bird Studies Canada have developed a website for birders in Canada to log their bird counts and sightings by location.

Start by visiting www.ebird.org to create an account. After you have signed in, you can click the submit observation tab and follow the instructions to select the location of where your data was collected using a map tool or GPS coordinates. After that you can enter the data you have collected, making it available to other birders around the country and globe!

In addition, a smartphone app has been launched so you can log your data on your phone while in the field! The app is called BirdsEye BirdLog – North America, and it is available for both iPhone and Android operating systems. Enter your birding data into this app, and it uploads directly to eBird.

eBird is a public collection site, so Nature Alberta is able to use it as a convenient tool to gather information from birders from all over Alberta, and it’s a fun and easy way for everyone to get involved in the birding community!
As a conservation-driven organization, Nature Alberta believes that following these practices promotes the health and well-being of birds and other animals, humans, and habitat while out in the field. When visiting natural areas, one must always ensure that their presence makes as little impact as possible upon the natural environment and the animals and plants which inhabit the area. This entails some basic knowledge of natural areas, as well as the use of good judgment. The following principles should provide guidance on how to best treat and experience Alberta’s natural areas, while ensuring that future generations will also have the privilege of enjoying them.

- **Learn patterns** of animal behaviour – know when not to interfere with their life cycles

- **Understand** which wildlife species are most sensitive to disturbance and when they are most sensitive (ie: nesting season)

- **Stay on trails** that are intended for use whenever possible – this helps preserve the rest of the natural area

- **Become familiar** with the laws of location – what are the appropriate minimum distances for approaching wildlife?

- **Understand the provisions** of the Alberta Wildlife Act, Migratory Bird Convention Act, and Species At Risk Act to assure the appropriate protection of wildlife and habitats

- **Understand the status** of wildlife in Alberta as outlined by the Alberta Endangered Species Conservation Committee

- **Generally treat** the wildlife, plants, and places with **respect**

- **Be prepared** for unexpected events – this is an easy way to avoid preventable accidents or other mishaps

- **Inform others** if you notice them engaging in harmful or risky behaviour that may endanger themselves or the wildlife

- **Report inappropriate behaviour** to authorities. Violations of the Alberta Wildlife Act, Migratory Bird Convention Act, or Species At Risk Act should be reported to Report a Poacher (1-800-642-3800)
More Info

For more information about birding, the IBA program, and local stewards mentioned in this guide, check out:

Alberta Conservation Association
www.ab-conservation.com

Alberta Parks
www.albertaparks.ca

Beaverhill Bird Observatory
www.beaverhillbirds.com

BirdLife International
www.birdlife.org

Bird Studies Canada
www.bsc-eoc.org

Boreal Birding
www.borealbirding.ca

Ducks Unlimited Canada
www.ducks.ca

eBird
www.ebird.org

IBA Canada
www.ibacanada.ca

Kimiwan Lake Naturalists & Interpretive Centre
www.kimiwanbirdwalk.ca

Lac La Biche Birding Society

Lesser Slave Lake Bird Observatory
www.lslbo.org

Nature Alberta
www.naturealberta.ca

Peace Parkland Naturalists
www.peaceparklandnaturalists.ca

The Nature Alberta Website is just one of the great resources available for gathering more information on IBA locations across Alberta.
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